

Baldwin-Sharpless House (Ashbridge House)
North side of U.S. Route 30 (Lincoln Highway),
.7 mile east of State Route 113, .4 mile east
of Downingtown
Downingtown Vicinity (East Caln Township)
Chester County
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-1309

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. PA-1309

BALDWIN-SHARPLESS HOUSE
(Ashbridge House)

Location: North side of U.S. Route 30 (Lincoln Highway), .7 mile east of State Route 113, .4 mile east of Downingtown, Downingtown Vicinity (East Caln Township), Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Mr. Ray Sheeler, 21 Lancaster Avenue, Downingtown, Pennsylvania.

Present Use: Rental property, divided into two apartments.

Statement of Significance: This early 18th century stone house while retaining much of its original appearance illustrates through its additions the growth of a farm house belonging to a Quaker family over many generations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Original section very early 18th century.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: This property has been transferred as follows: James Wallis by deed to John Baldwin in 1702; John Baldwin by will to his grandson Joshua Baldwin in 1731; Joshua Baldwin by deed to his son-in-law Nathan Sharpless in 1794; Nathan Sharpless by will to his son Jacob Sharpless in 1837; Jacob Sharpless and wife Mary by wills dated 1863 and 1875 to daughter Elizabeth (Sharpless) Ashbridge; Abram S. Ashbridge and wife Elizabeth (Sharpless) Ashbridge to sons Richard I. and Joseph G. Ashbridge in 1900; Richard I. Ashbridge (d. 1936) and Joseph G. Ashbridge (d. 1943) by will to sister Eleanor Ashbridge; Eleanor Ashbridge by deed to Ray G. Sheeler in 1953.
4. Original plans and construction: The early 18th century house probably consisted of what is now the west three bays with a kitchen wing on the rear.
5. Alterations and additions: Circa 1755 a center hall and two rooms were added to the east of the original house changing it to a center hall plan with two rooms on each side. The original stairway in the northeast corner of the rear room on the west was retained.

Circa 1810 the original house was deepened and the pitch of the roof changed to match the circa 1755 addition. A second kitchen was put into the northwest room at this time necessitating the building of a third arch in the west wall of the cellar to support the present kitchen fireplace chimney. The original kitchen wing became a summer kitchen and bake house. Also circa 1810 the woodwork in the original house was modernized. After 1958 the house was divided into two apartments, of two-and-a-half floors each.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:
When the house was first built, it stood on the south side of the old provincial road, the forerunner of the Lancaster Turnpike of 1794. The house is a good example of the development of a home belonging to a prosperous Quaker family in the Great Valley area.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: A drawing of the house appears on a map of the Lancaster Turnpike made in 1792 by George Thomas. It is a sizeable house in comparison with others on the same map. Original is in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania.
2. Bibliography:
 - a. Cope, Gilbert, Cenealogy of the Sharpless Family, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1887.
 - b. Clippings and manuscript files in the Chester County Historical Society under the heading: East Caln Township: Lands.
 - c. Wills and deeds in the Chester County Court House, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This early 18th century farm house retains much of its original appearance and contains much fine woodwork.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair, but growing worse.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house measures 51' (six-bay front) x 33'-6" and is two-and-a-half stories. There is a small one-story kitchen wing located at the rear of the house measuring 13'-6" x 18'-6".
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Coursed rubble (stucco over stone on east side of south facade).
4. Porches, stoops and bulkheads: On the east side of the front of the house there is a four-bay porch with a shed roof supported by simple, slender wooden columns. Old pent roofs remain on the west side of the front and the rear of the house. All porches have wooden shingle roofs.
5. Chimneys: There are two inside end brick chimneys on the main part of the house. On the kitchen wing there is a massive stone and brick chimney.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The two entrance doors on south facade are six-paneled doors with four-light rectangular transoms above them. There are two doors on the rear and one on the west facade of the house.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Most of the windows are wooden sash, double hung, six-over-six and six-over-nine light. The two first floor windows on the east side of the front facade have three-paneled wooden shutters with a heart-shaped cutout in the top panel.
7. Roof
 - a. Shape and covering: Steeply pitched gable roof with modern asbestos shingles. Ridge of roof is parallel to the road.
 - b. Cornice and eaves: Simple wooden box cornice.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas and towers: There is a single shed roof dormer centered in the roof of the house. It is considered a rare survival in this county.

C. Description of Interior: (West apartment was inaccessible; description deals with east apartment only).

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Basement in west side of house has a dirt floor; the floor in the east side is cement.
- b. First floor: Front door enters into stair hall, which has a small kitchen at the end of it. There is a living room to the east of stair hall and a bedroom east of the kitchen. All the rooms retain original woodwork and paneling except the kitchen.
- c. Second floor: Plan is similar to first floor: two rooms, bath and hall with stairway to attic located behind door in hall.

2. Stairways: Staircase in east apartment, built in 1755, is the original one-run, right-handed stair with twelve risers and solid stair rail.

3. Flooring: Wide wooden floor boards of uniform width have linoleum covering in some of the rooms.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Paint over plaster.

5. Doorways and doors: Interior of door in kitchen of east apartment is built of diagonal boards. Original door leading from hall into kitchen (see HABS photo) has been removed. Door to attic stairs is made of vertical boards.

6. Trim: Fireplace on the east wall of the southeast room on the first floor has a rectangular opening set within a plastered segmental arch. The mid-Georgian bolelection molding and mantel shelf extend beyond the length of the fireplace opening by a few feet on either side. Beside the fireplace (towards the north wall) is a full-length cupboard with a three-paneled door, which was probably used for storing wood. On the other side of the fireplace, the wall is paneled and contains the opening to a closet. Inside the closet there is a built-in cupboard with shelves beneath it. Presently, this closet is boarded over. There is also a built-in cupboard in the north room on the first floor. On the second floor on the east wall of the southeast room, the fireplace opening is a segmental arch in a plaster wall; it is without trim. Two small cupboards are set

into the wall a few feet north of the fireplace. Perhaps they were placed there to make use of extra space between the flues of the fireplace beneath it. On the south side of the fireplace is a four-paneled door to a closet.

7. Hardware: Very fine iron strap hinges and iron latches on most of the interior doors. Old wooden box latches on door to attic.
8. Lighting: Modern electricity introduced.
9. Four fireplaces remain in the east side of the house; however, most of them are boarded over.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House is set very close to the north side of U.S. Route 30. When it was built, it was on the south side of the old provincial road. Land on the south side of U.S. Route 30, once farm land belonging to the house, has been commercially developed and the farm buildings on it demolished.
2. Outbuildings: There is a smokehouse northwest of the house.
3. Landscaping: There are several large trees on the property as well as a stone retaining wall across the rear separating the house from a parking lot.

Prepared by Priscilla L. Cox
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The records were prepared as part of a cooperative survey of 100 Chester County buildings conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Chester County Historical Society between 1958 and 1962. This was the first large-scale project undertaken after the reinstitution of HABS in 1957, and it established the pattern of cooperation with state and local preservation groups which has characterized the HABS program in recent years. Written data was prepared by Bart Anderson, Curator of the Chester County Historical Society with the assistance of Jim Sorber and others. HABS hired local professional

photographer, Ned Goode, to take the documentary photographs. The written material was edited and expanded in 1975 by Marion Morton working under contract with HABS.